

Book Reviews

“Malignant Brain Tumours.” D G T Thomas and D I Graham (Eds). Springer-Verlag London Limited 1995. ISBN 3-540-19689-7. £95.

This book attempts and to a great extent achieves, its apparent object to review brain tumours in a comprehensive manner.

It is a series of chapters by appropriate experts ranging in subject from molecular genetics, through clinical presentation, investigations to the various forms of management. It is up-to-date. The book's editors are well known and credible - a neurosurgeon and a neuropathologist.

There are two good statements in the preface that “there is some optimism that matters albeit slowly will change for the better” and “perhaps as never before, it is appreciated that a multidisciplinary approach to these difficult tumours is required”.

The first two chapters discuss cellular and molecular aspects of tumours. They point to an increasing understanding of these cells not just cytologically but antigenitically, holding out the prospect of greater predictability and even therapy as in the case of the leukaemias. The interesting “two-hit” hypophesis of Knudson is reviewed referring to the timing of mutation.

There is a long but readable section on the vexed problem of tumour classification and a clear series of colour plate histology.

The clinical presentation of these lesions is well covered including a description of focal and global brain effects.

There are separate chapters on such aspects as low grade gliomas, tumours in children, the AIDS syndrome and metastases. The description of the presentation and management of craniopharyngioma in children is particularly good.

The surgical management - of natural interest to this reviewer - is well described verbally but of course it is not a manual of operative technique. Adjuvant therapy involving radio-chemo - and immuno therapies are discussed. The limitation of all of these, including surgery, are honestly portrayed. In the surgical technical section there is a very good description of the as yet unproven image guided computer controlled resection. There is also a timely piece on the tolerance of the central nervous system to radiotherapy, both in adults and perhaps, more importantly, in children.

It is an excellent comprehensive book with a multitude of references. It is physically well produced, on reasonable quality paper.

D P BYRNES

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis Surgical management.
Devinder Kumar & John Alexander-Williams. 244 pages
£75. Springer-Verlag. ISBN 3-540-19730-3.

This monograph is a substantial resumee of the two diseases which, together, are referred to as inflammatory bowel disease and is based on the experience of the team in Birmingham.

There is an interesting historical introduction and brief reference to aetiopathology and nutrition as well as a section on psychological factors but the bulk of the book concerns surgical aspects. The authors decided to separate Crohn's disease from ulcerative colitis for reasons of philosophy of treatments and because the range of interventions is greater for Crohn's disease.

The longer section is on Crohn's disease and is written by Alexander-Williams, reflecting his personal practice based on more than a thousand operations. This is a comprehensive review, moving from principles and preparation to surgical detail (including his preferred methods of anastomosis and abdominal closure). The section on strictureplasty is well written and reflects the author's interest. He deals well with surgical objectives and the prevention and management of complications, while the chapters on fistulae and perianal disease bear close scrutiny.

Ulcerative colitis is well covered by Kumar, who lays out surgical options, indications and preparatory investigations, before detailing the surgical procedures. His preference in restorative proctocolectomy is for an S-pouch without a spout as he believes that this gives good results in terms of reservoir capacity, stool frequency and spontaneous evacuation. The sections on pouch function and complications of pouch surgery are especially noteworthy.

As a result of dealing with the two problems separately there is, undoubtedly repetition but it allows the reader easy access to information on specific questions. Overall however this book, whilst being a useful review, does not contain anything new and its main interest lies in the distillate of a lifetime's experience in the field of Crohn's disease from Alexander-Williams. It will prove to be a useful reference work.

A J WILKINSON

“Therapeutic Antibodies”. Editors: J Landon and T Chard.
Publisher: Springer-Verlag. ISBN 3-40-19722-2. ISBN 0387-19722-2. No of pages-231.

This book gives a very comprehensive account of the uses of monoclonal and polyclonal antibodies both for the diagnosis and treatment of a variety of disorders. Seventeen individual authors contribute chapters in this book and like many books with multiple authors, the style, complexity and degree of enthusiasm varies from chapter to chapter.

In some places it is rather simplistic particularly when it deals with the biology of the immune response while in others, such as the chapter relating to catalytic antibodies, the complexity is such that individuals not working in the field of organic chemistry would find it rather difficult to follow.

There are a number of areas such as the use of antibodies within previously immunised hens' eggs for the treatment of gastro-intestinal diseases which I found novel and interesting. Although the chapter relating to the therapeutic use of antibodies to snake venom is perhaps a little irrelevant to clinicians working in this country.

Overall, however, I found it a very enjoyable book to read. It was quite thought provoking and the underlying message appears to be that although much interest has centred on the development and use of monoclonal antibodies, there is still